

## DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 402 788

FL 024 353

AUTHOR Schneider, Elke  
TITLE Teaching Foreign Languages to At-Risk Learners. ERIC Digest.  
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, Washington, D.C.  
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.  
REPORT NO EDO-FL-97-03  
PUB DATE Dec 96  
CONTRACT RR93002010  
NOTE 4p.  
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC/CLL, 1118 22nd Street N.W., Washington, DC 20037.  
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)  
  
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.  
DESCRIPTORS Elementary Secondary Education; German; \*Grammar; \*High Risk Students; Language Patterns; \*Learning Disabilities; Metacognition; \*Morphology (Languages); \*Phonology; \*Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; \*Teaching Methods; Vocabulary Development  
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

## ABSTRACT

This digest introduces a specialized approach to teaching at-risk students a foreign language. In the dyslexia literature, the approach is referred to as "multisensory structured language." Because the methodology places a strong emphasis on the metacognitive aspects of language in both native and foreign language instruction, the term "multisensory, structured, metacognitive language instruction" (MSML) is used to address at risk students' weaknesses in recognizing linguistic rules and structure patterns, which are necessary tools for becoming independent users of a foreign language. The approach involves the students in learning to access their linguistic knowledge and the instructor in facilitating metacognitive thought processes. MSML instruction is multisensory, structured, explicit, cumulative, metacognitive, highly repetitive, phonetic, alphabetic, and analytic/synthetical. Each 45- to 60-minute lesson focuses on one of the following rule systems: phonology/orthography, grammar, or vocabulary/morphology. These lessons are discussed in detail, and sample exercises are provided. (Author/JL)

\*\*\*\*\*  
\* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made \*  
\* from the original document. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

ED 402 788

# TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES TO AT-RISK STUDENTS

ERIC DIGEST

BY ELKE SCHNEIDER

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
Office of Educational Resources and Improving  
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION  
CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as  
received from the person or organization  
originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to  
improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this  
document do not necessarily represent  
official OERI position or policy.

FL C24 353

# Digest

December 1996

(EDO-FL-97-03)

## Teaching Foreign Languages to At-Risk Learners

Elke Schneider, Miami University of Ohio

The number of students classified with learning disabilities who attend colleges and universities has increased over the past 10 years (Vogel & Adelman, 1993). The 2-year foreign language requirement, a policy at many U.S. colleges and universities, can be a major stumbling block for students with learning disabilities. Self-reports indicate that, despite histories of struggle, many of these students want to learn a foreign language (Javorsky, Sparks, & Ganschow, 1992). Two other groups of at-risk foreign language learners are those whose learning disabilities are not identified until they are in college, and those who remain unclassified because they do not report their difficulties to college learning assistance providers.

Researchers and practitioners in high school and higher education settings have become increasingly aware of the difficulties students with language learning disabilities encounter as they learn a foreign language. A handful of high schools have demonstrated success in foreign language instruction with alternative approaches that are commonly used to teach native reading and writing skills to students with learning disabilities. (For a review of the literature, see Ganschow, Sparks, & Schneider, 1995). For over 40 years, findings have demonstrated that students with language difficulties profit from a highly structured, multisensory, direct, and explicit approach that helps them to see and understand how language is structured and provides ample opportunities for practice in a language-controlled environment (see McIntyre & Pickering, 1995).

This Digest introduces a specialized approach to teaching at-risk students a foreign language based on experiences teaching German. In the dyslexia literature, the methodology is referred to as *multisensory structured language* (MSL) (McIntyre & Pickering, 1995). Because the methodology places a strong emphasis on the metacognitive aspects of language in both native and foreign language instruction—for example, helping students understand how language is structured—the author uses the term *multisensory, structured, metacognitive language instruction* (MSML) to address at-risk students' weaknesses in recognizing linguistic rules and structure patterns, which are necessary tools to become independent users of a foreign language. MSML involves the students in learning to access their linguistic knowledge and the instructor in facilitating metacognitive thought processes.

### The MSML Training Program

MSML instruction is adapted from the MSL Orton/Gillingham principles for teaching students with difficulties reading, writing, and spelling in their native language (Gillingham & Stillman, 1969). Given the emphasis on explicit teaching of rules, the approach runs contrary to the current trend of implicit rule instruction in foreign languages (Krashen, 1981). The theoretical foundation for the approach is based on the Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis, which proposes that foreign language learning difficulties stem in part from native language difficulties (Sparks, Ganschow, & Pohlman, 1989).

MSML instruction is multisensory, structured, explicit, cumulative, metacognitive, highly repetitive, phonetic, alphabetic, and analytic/synthetic. Each 45- to 60-minute lesson focuses on one of the following three rule systems: phonology/orthography, grammar, or vocabulary/morphology.

### Phonology/Orthography Training

In the phonology/orthography training, drill cards with phonograms (a single letter or letter combination for a single sound or sound combination) are used and practiced in a six-part lesson. (1) In the *visual drill*, students see a card and provide all the sounds they know for it. (2) In the *auditory drill*, students hear a sound or sound combination and write down the spellings. (3) In the *blending drill*, students read single syllabic nonsense or real words by providing the sound for each and then blending the sounds into a word. (4) In the *spelling exercise*, students practice newly learned sound/symbols in short nonsense and meaningful words, phrases, and sentences. (5) In the *reading exercise*, students read short words, phrases, and sentences that emphasize a new phonogram. (6) In the *final rule summary*, students summarize the newly learned rule(s) orally and in written form (structured summary sheet) to reinforce metalinguistic processing skills.

Figure 1: Phonogram Drill Card

front of card	back of card
ä	<p>The unlauted vowel is long (like A in BAD) when followed by no more than one consonant. The unlauted vowel is short (like A in AT) when followed by more than one consonant</p> <p><b>Position</b> Initial: der Äther (ether) Middle: die Gäste (guests) Final: not applicable unless followed by silent-h: Mäh! (mow!)</p>

### Grammar Training

After achieving basic knowledge of German sound/symbols, students learn inflectional rules, sentence structure patterns, and tenses. Here, students go through five phases: (1) In the *rule presentation/discovery phase*, the instructor introduces students to the new topic in a step-by-step discovery learning process. Following working-step instructions provided on a rule poster, students move differently shaped and colored cards around that represent different parts of speech and grammatical functions. The poster remains visible throughout the instructional period. (2) In the *color-card phase*, students repeat these working steps with colored-shaped cards (moving cards) until they have memorized the new concept.

To reinforce the metalinguistic processing skills, students are consistently encouraged to provide reasons for why they chose a certain solution (providing rules). (3) In the *white card phase*, students practice the rule further without the benefit of color but with continuous kinesthetic reinforcement and metalinguistic processing. Figure 2 shows an example of these two card phases.

**Figure 2: Colored or White Card Phase**

INSTRUCTIONS: Form correct sentences in the simple past and present perfect and explain why you did what you did.

SUBJECT (yellow)	VERB COMPONENTS (pink)	DIRECT OBJECT (blue)
DIE GÄSTE	GEKAUFT SPIELTEN	DREI HUNDE
PETER	GEFÜTTERT HAT	TENNIS

**ANSWER KEY:**

SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT	VERB
1) Die Gäste	spielten	Tennis.	
2) Peter	hat	drei Hunde	gefüttert.

(4) In the exercise sheet phase (see Figure 3), students use their knowledge without the benefit of color or kinesthetic reinforcement but continue to practice metalinguistic processing skills in different gap-filling exercises by verbalizing their decisions.

**Figure 3: Sample Exercise Sheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**WORK SHEET: FINITE VERBS IN PRESENT TENSE**  
Fill in the appropriate verb ending. Füge die passende Verbendung ein.

1. Silvia tanz\_\_\_\_\_gerne.
2. Sie trink\_\_\_\_\_gerne Kaffee.
3. Fred und Maria trink\_\_\_\_\_auch gerne Kaffee.
4. Sie geh\_\_\_\_\_oft ins Cafe "Wien".
5. Komm\_\_\_\_\_du mit ins Cafe, Franz?", frag\_\_\_\_\_Silvia.
6. Nein, ich fahr\_\_\_\_\_heute nach Hause.
7. Franz frag\_\_\_\_\_:"Geh\_\_\_\_\_ihr am Sonntag ins Cafe?"
8. Silvia antwort\_\_\_\_\_:"Nein, leider nicht. Wir hab\_\_\_\_\_am Montag eine Englischprüfung.
9. Franz sag\_\_\_\_\_:"Na dann, viel Spaß heute!"

5) In the final rule summary, students write and explain in their own words the rule patterns learned in the lesson including mnemonic devices, thus reinforcing the metalinguistic awareness process. Figure 4 presents an example of a rule summary sheet.

**Figure 4: Sample Rule Summary Sheet**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Grammar Rule: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

General Rule: \_\_\_\_\_

Details/Examples: \_\_\_\_\_

Keywords/Other information to remember: \_\_\_\_\_

## Vocabulary/Morphology Training

Vocabulary/morphology training focuses on raising students' awareness of semantic units, or morphemes (e.g., compound nouns, affixes), in words and gender distribution rules (e.g., all nouns ending in *-heit* or *-keit* take the feminine article *die*). It begins with a basic vocabulary training phase in which students develop their own vocabulary cards with pictures and color-coding of gender and nouns. After students have a vocabulary of about 100 words, a more detailed vocabulary/morphology training begins. Recognition and memorization of semantic units of words (e.g., affixes, patterns such as noun + noun, adjective + noun) are learned by going through the same five grammar training phases of rule presentation/ discovery, colored and white card practice, sheet exercises, and rule summary. To develop efficient vocabulary decoding and encoding skills, the student builds morphological grids of either word families (e.g., *bilden*) or vocabulary with identical word patterns (e.g., adjective + suffix *heit* = noun). Figure 5 shows a sample morphological grid. Students use these vocabulary items also in short sentence/paragraphs of dictations and in their own small writing projects.

**Figure 5: Sample Morphological Vocabulary Organizer of the Word *bilden* (to form, build)**

Prefix	ROOT	Suffix	WORD	Translation
AUS	BILD	EN	ausbilden (verb)	educate
AUS	BILD	UNG	Ausbildung (noun)	education
EIN	BILD	UNG	Einbildung (noun)	imagination

This training allows students to categorize vocabulary into systematic chunks, thereby enhancing reading, writing, spelling, speaking, and listening skills.

In conclusion, students who demonstrate difficulties learning to read, write, and spell in their native language are likely to experience similar difficulties in a foreign language. An MSML approach to instruction may provide the additional support struggling students need for success in the foreign language classroom.

## References

- Ganschow, L., Sparks, R., & Schneider, E. (1995). Learning a foreign language: Challenges for students with language learning difficulties. *International Journal of the British Dyslexia Association*, 1, 75-95.
- Gillingham, A., & Stillman, B.E. (1969). *Remedial training for children with and without specific learning disability in reading, spelling, and penmanship*. Cambridge, MA: Educators Publishing Service.
- Javorsky, J., Sparks, R., & Ganschow, L. (1992). Perceptions of college students with and without specific learning disabilities about foreign language courses. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 7, 31-44.
- Krashen, S.D. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McIntyre, C.W., & Pickering, J.S. (1995). *Clinical studies of multisensory structured language education. For students with dyslexia and related disorders*. Salem, OR: IMSLEC.
- Sparks, R., Ganschow, L., & Pohlman, J. (1989). Linguistic coding deficits in foreign language learners. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 39, 179-95.
- Vogel, S., & Adelman, P.B. (Eds.). (1993). *Success for college students with learning disabilities*. New York, NY: Springer Verlag.

This report was prepared with funding from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Dept. of Education, under contract no. RR93002010. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI or ED.

